

# MEDIA AND DIGITAL LITERACY AMONG OLDER ADULTS

## DIGITELD PROJECT

POLICY RECOMMENDATION AND BEST PRACTICE

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## DIGITELD PROJECT PRESENTATION

The DIGITELD project, a KA220-ADU under ERASMUS+ Programme, successfully addressed the pressing issue of low digital and media literacy among older adults, a demographic group particularly vulnerable to misinformation and digital exclusion. Through its initiatives, the project significantly enhanced the media and information literacy (MIL) and digital literacy (DL) skills of senior citizens, particularly those over the age of 65 in Belgium and Italy.

The core of the project was the delivery of two comprehensive training courses, tailored to empower seniors with the technical and analytical skills needed to navigate the digital landscape confidently. These courses, led by experienced professionals from the fields of journalism and academia, focused on equipping participants to recognize fake news, particularly in the areas of political propaganda and health disinformation. The project bridged a critical skills gap and enabled seniors to engage more effectively with digital tools and platforms.

A major milestone of the DIGITELD project was the development and successful implementation of an online training course (MOOC). Designed collaboratively by the Fondation Privée pour la Promotion de la Profession de Journaliste (FPPJ) and the University of Macerata (UNIMC), the MOOC integrated expertise from various fields, including digital media sociology, public internet law, communication psychology, and journalism. This innovative resource, composed of modular learning units, served as a foundation for in-person lessons and was disseminated widely via the EPALE platform to ensure its accessibility and sustainability.

The project was made possible through the collaboration of key partners:

- The **FPPJ Foundation**, which coordinated the project and contributed its in-depth knowledge of the journalistic profession and the media information landscape.
- The **University of Macerata (UNIMC)**, whose Department of Political Science, Communication, and International Relations brought invaluable expertise in media studies and information technology applied to communication.

DIGITELD successfully facilitated knowledge exchange between the two partners, ensuring that both Belgian and Italian participants accessed the same high-quality training materials. By combining in-person lessons with the scalability of the MOOC, the project left a lasting impact, fostering digital inclusion and resilience among senior citizens.

What makes DIGITELD *innovative* is its focus on addressing a critical yet often overlooked issue. Several academic studies have highlighted that individuals over the age of 65 are among the most likely to read and share fake news on social media—up to seven times more than those aged 18-29. However, a significant gap exists in comprehensive data regarding internet usage among the elderly, particularly those over the age of 74. Most research, including recent studies such as *"Shaping Europe's Digital Future,"* has focused on individuals aged 16-74, leaving those over 74 largely unexamined.

DIGITELD sets itself apart by intentionally including individuals over 74 in its scope, recognizing their unique challenges and needs in the digital sphere. This approach not only fills a crucial research gap but also ensures that digital literacy and media literacy initiatives are accessible and relevant to this often neglected demographic.

## DIGITELD COUNTRIES PERSPECTIVE

### BELGIUM

Belgium is facing a dual challenge of an aging population and a rapidly digitalizing society, with older adults often lagging behind in digital literacy and media competencies. This demographic, which constitutes a significant portion of the population, is particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion, misinformation, and fake news. Understanding the political framework surrounding media and digital literacy for older adults is crucial to addressing these issues.

#### **Aging Population and Digital Divide**

In Belgium, individuals aged 65 and above represent nearly 20% of the population, a figure expected to grow significantly in the coming decades. Digital literacy among older adults remains low, with studies showing that 58% of individuals aged 55–74 lack basic digital skills, and 15% have never used the internet. This digital divide not only limits their access to online services but also makes them more susceptible to misinformation, particularly in critical areas such as health and politics.

#### **National and Regional Policies**

Belgium has developed several regional and national initiatives to promote digital inclusion and media literacy, especially among older adults:

- **Brussels Region's "Plan d'Appropriation Numérique" (2021–2024):** Focuses on reducing digital disparities by providing training in basic digital skills for older adults, including in nursing and retirement homes. This includes training in communication tools, e-banking, online public services, and cybersecurity.
- **Flanders' "Iedereen Digitaal" Action Plan:** Emphasizes local e-inclusion with initiatives like "digibuddies" networks and monitoring civil servants' digital skills. It aims to combat digital exclusion by investing in communication technologies and educational policies targeted at vulnerable populations, including older adults.
- **Walloon Digital Strategy:** Allocates funding to improve digital skills and establish digital public spaces, emphasizing accessibility for older adults.

These policies highlight the commitment to integrating older adults into the digital society while addressing barriers such as affordability, accessibility, and user-friendliness.

#### **Key Challenges**

1. **Lack of Basic Skills:** Older adults often struggle with the fundamentals of digital technology, such as using devices, navigating websites, and understanding digital jargon.
2. **Misinformation:** Fake news disproportionately affects older adults due to limited media literacy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation led to confusion and harmful behaviors, exposing the critical need for better education.
3. **Digital Exclusion:** With the increasing digitization of public services, older adults without digital skills face exclusion, limiting their ability to access essential services and participate fully in society.

## Existing Initiatives

Belgium participates in several projects aimed at improving media literacy and digital skills among older adults:

- **DISINFOCHECK:** A multilingual collaboration to detect and combat disinformation campaigns.
- **e-EngAGEd Project:** Promotes intergenerational learning by training young volunteers to coach older adults in media and digital literacy.
- **AGE Platform Europe:** Advocates for reducing inequalities and enabling older adults to live full, dignified lives through digital inclusion.

Belgium's political and social strategies recognize the importance of media and digital literacy for older adults. However, there is a pressing need for more targeted efforts to bridge the digital divide and combat misinformation. This includes enhancing access to digital tools, providing tailored training programs, and fostering intergenerational support systems to ensure that older adults can navigate the digital world with confidence and resilience.

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## ITALY

Italy, characterized by one of the oldest populations in Europe, faces significant challenges in bridging the digital divide and fostering media literacy among its senior citizens. The country's rapidly aging demographic, with over 24% of the population aged 65 or older, makes digital and media literacy a pressing political and social issue, especially in combating misinformation.

## Aging Population and Digital Divide

Italy is home to an aging population, with a high proportion of individuals over the age of 65 and a growing number above 80. Despite progress, Italy ranks among the lowest in Europe in terms of digital competencies, with only 45.7% of individuals aged 16–74 possessing basic digital skills. Among older adults, this figure drops significantly, exacerbating their vulnerability to digital exclusion and misinformation.

## Legislative Framework and National Initiatives

At the national level, Italy has initiated several programs aimed at improving digital competencies for older adults:

1. **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR):** Mission 1 focuses on digitization, innovation, and inclusivity, including initiatives like "Digital Schools for Seniors," which provide free digital literacy training across the country.
2. **Repubblica Digitale (Digital Republic):** A strategic initiative promoting digital inclusion among various social groups, including older adults, to reduce the digital divide and foster the adoption of new technologies.
3. **Senior Citizens Decree (2024):** Establishes nationwide training centers for older adults to enhance digital literacy and support their integration into digital public services like SPID and the IO App.

These programs aim to create a unified approach to digital education while addressing regional disparities and accessibility challenges.

### Local and Regional Strategies

Italy's regions and municipalities have also implemented localized programs tailored to older adults:

- **Pane e Internet (Emilia-Romagna):** A regional initiative offering digital skills training and promoting the effective use of new technologies.
- **Progetto Gemma (Umbria):** Focuses on digital inclusion through European Social Fund resources, targeting older adults to enhance their quality of life.
- **Nonni su Internet:** A long-running program involving intergenerational training, where younger students teach older adults digital skills in schools.

These efforts emphasize community-level engagement and intergenerational approaches, fostering digital inclusion at the grassroots level.

### Key Challenges

1. **Misinformation:** Older adults are particularly susceptible to fake news due to limited media literacy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation posed significant risks, underscoring the importance of targeted education.
2. **Regional Disparities:** Uneven implementation of national policies and varying local resources create gaps in access to digital education.
3. **Socio-Economic Barriers:** Factors like low income, education levels, and geographic isolation further hinder digital adoption among older adults.

Italy's political and social framework recognizes the critical importance of digital and media literacy for older adults. National and local strategies aim to close the digital divide by fostering education and accessibility. However, sustained funding, regional alignment, and tailored interventions are essential to ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives. Strengthening digital literacy for older adults will not only combat misinformation but also promote their social inclusion and participation in an increasingly digital world.

One of the main objectives of the DIGITELD project was to collect data on the digital and media literacy skills of the over-65 target group through the administration of two surveys. The first survey was designed to assess the participants' initial skills, while the second focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the training provided.

The two surveys were structured as follows:

### DIGITELD – Post training survey

#### 1.1 Privacy disclaimer:

The purpose of this survey is to collect information for the selection process of training programs within the DIGITELD project. The FPPJ Foundation (BE) and the University of Macerata (IT), partners in the project, will handle the collection and analysis of this data. The information gathered will be used not only for the selection process but also for academic research, contributing to the development of scientific publications.

You are invited to participate in this survey as a prospective participant for the training courses. Your participation is entirely voluntary. The survey involves filling out a questionnaire that will take about 5 minutes to complete, focusing on some personal details and your digital skills. This information will be used exclusively for the purposes for which it was collected, unless you provide additional consent or as required or permitted by law. We will retain your personal information only for as long as necessary to fulfill the purposes for which it was collected or as required by law. All responses will be treated with confidentiality.

#### 2.1 Personal data

Name:

Surname:

Email:

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say

Age:

Educational Background: ☐ None ☐ Elementary School ☐ Middle School ☐ High School ☐ University

- Phd/Postgraduate education

#### 3.1 Digital skills

We ask you to evaluate your skills with respect to the following online activities, using a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 corresponds to "NOT AT ALL CAPABLE" and 4 corresponds to "VERY CAPABLE"

	<i>Not at all capable</i>	<i>Slightly capable</i>	<i>Quite capable</i>	<i>Very capable</i>
	1	2	3	4
Searching the Internet for information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using digital tools (e.g. websites, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, applications, etc.) to share information with other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Re-processing the information I find online to create new content to be disseminated through digital tools (e.g. websites, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, applications, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognising false information that I find on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Checking if information that I found on the Internet is reliable or not	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 4.1 Information skills

How much do you agree with the following statements? Please express an opinion on a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 corresponds to "COMPLETELY DISAGREE" and 5 corresponds to "COMPLETELY AGREE".

	Completely DISAGREE				Completely AGREE
	1	2	3	4	5
I know what reliable and unreliable information is available on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know where to find reliable information on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to find reliable information on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to use the Internet to inform me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to use the information I find on the Internet to benefit me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have the skills I need to evaluate the information I find on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can identify the difference between credible and non-credible information on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident in using information from the Internet to make decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you think the following statement is true or false: "I think that the official version of events given by the authorities very often hides the truth"?

Completely false	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely true
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## RESULTS

work in progress

## BEST PRACTICES

work in progress

## ADULT LEARNING: EUROPEAN CONTEXT

### WHAT ABOUT EU POLICIES?

The European Union has undertaken substantial measures to advance adult learning throughout its Member States, recognizing the pivotal role of lifelong education in fostering social inclusion, resilience, and economic growth. Through comprehensive frameworks, strategic action plans, and collaborative networks, the EU aspires to broaden participation in adult learning, bridge skill gaps, and ensure that educational opportunities are accessible and aligned with the diverse needs of its citizens. Central to these efforts is the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, which upholds the right to education, training, and lifelong learning under its first principle. As part of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the EU has set an ambitious target: by 2030, a minimum of 60% of adults should engage in training annually. Nevertheless, participation in education and training beyond formal schooling remains insufficient across Europe, presenting a significant challenge to achieving

this objective. To address these limitations, the EU provides targeted support to national institutions and individuals, enhancing their capacity to address obstacles in adult learning and fostering the exchange of successful practices among Member States.

The **European Skills Agenda** further complements these initiatives by proposing actions to enhance sustainable competitiveness, social equity, and resilience. Among its core recommendations are the introduction of individual learning accounts and the establishment of micro-credentials, both designed to cultivate a culture of lifelong learning by making educational opportunities more accessible and widely recognized. These proposals enable individuals to continuously develop their skills and remain adaptable to evolving labor market demands.

In November 2021, the Council adopted a **Resolution on a New European Agenda for Adult Learning**, setting out a forward-looking vision for the development of adult education by 2030. The resolution highlights key priorities, including the enhancement of governance through national strategies and partnerships, the expansion of lifelong learning opportunities with sustainable funding mechanisms, and the improvement of accessibility and flexibility to address the diverse needs of adult learners. Moreover, the agenda emphasizes the importance of improving quality, equity, and inclusion by investing in professional development for educators and addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups, while also tackling skill shortages related to the digital and green transitions. An additional dimension of the EU's approach involves career guidance, viewed as a critical tool to empower individuals in navigating their career trajectories and making informed educational and professional decisions. Supported by the European Commission in collaboration with CEDEFOP's CareersNet, career guidance services facilitate self-reflection on skills, ambitions, and talents, aligning these with labor market opportunities. A 2020 study conducted by the Commission underscores the significance of lifelong career development, particularly in response to challenges posed by the pandemic, rising unemployment, and the imperative for innovation to sustain employability.

To further advance adult learning, the **European Education Area strategic framework for 2021–2025** established a **Working Group on Adult Learning**. Composed of experts from Member States, this group works to operationalize the EU's vision for education and training, aligning its efforts with key initiatives such as the European Skills Agenda and Council Recommendations on Upskilling Pathways and Vocational Education and Training. Another cornerstone of the EU's efforts is **the Network of National Coordinators for Adult Learning**, which serves to promote adult education within Member States. These coordinators provide policy guidance, disseminate examples of best practices, and support national authorities in developing robust systems for adult learning. Through these multifaceted initiatives, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to creating a robust foundation for lifelong learning. By ensuring that all citizens have equitable access to opportunities for skill development, the EU not only supports individual learners but also contributes to broader societal objectives, including economic growth, social cohesion, and the transitions to a digital and green economy. These efforts underscore the EU's dedication to fostering a resilient and inclusive Europe that empowers its citizens to thrive in a rapidly changing global environment (European Commission, 2024)<sup>1</sup>.

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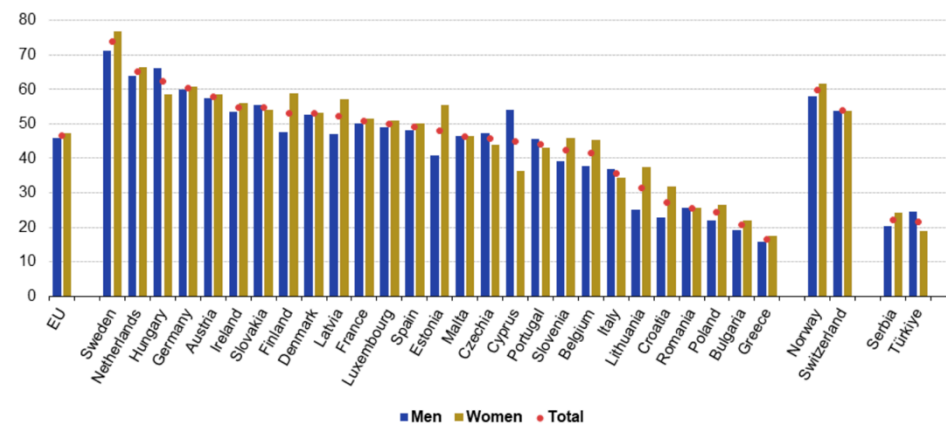
<sup>1</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/adult-learning/about-adult-learning>



To thrive in today's dynamic world and adapt to future societal, economic, and labor market transformations, individuals need the right knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes. Education and training are fundamental to the personal, civic, and professional development of European citizens. Digital technologies play a crucial role in creating adaptable learning environments, accessible materials, and inclusive teaching methods. However, this potential is only realized if the digital divide, both in infrastructure and skills, is adequately addressed. Average participation of adults in learning in the EU remains low, which puts at risk a truly sustainable and fair economic growth in the Union. Innovations in learning pathways, new educational approaches, including individual approaches, and in learning environments in all education and training institutions, including higher education institutions, as well as in workplace and community settings, are a pre-condition to better accommodate the needs of a wider range of learners, as a growing number of adults will need reskilling and upskilling.<sup>2</sup> The importance of adult learning is reflected in [EU-level targets](#), namely that by 2025, at least 47 % of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months ([European Education Area](#)) and that by 2030, at least 60 % of all adults should be participating in training every year ([European pillar of social rights](#)).<sup>3</sup> In 2022, according to the adult education survey (AES) the proportion of persons aged 25 to 64 in the [EU](#) who participated in education or training during the previous 12 months was 46.6 %, see Figure 1. Sweden and the Netherlands reported the highest participation rates (over 65 %) while Poland, Bulgaria and Greece had the lowest ones (below 25 %).<sup>4</sup>

**Participation rate in education and training (last 12 months) by sex, 2022**

(% of people aged 25-64, AES)



Note: ranked on overall participation (men and women)  
Source: Eurostat (online data code: trng\_aes\_100)

eurostat

However, in 2022, EUROSTAT data reveals a stark contrast when the focus shifts to the population aged 65 and over. The average participation rate in education and training across the EU drops

<sup>2</sup> Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01 (OJ C, C/66, 26.02.2021, p. 1, CELEX: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01)))

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult\\_learning\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult\\_learning\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics)

significantly to just 5.7%, underscoring a critical area of underperformance that warrants immediate attention. This low average highlights a considerable gap in engaging older adults in lifelong learning, despite the increasing importance of such initiatives in an era of rapid societal and technological change.

Notably, some countries stand out as leaders in this area. Denmark takes the lead with a participation rate of 24.3%, followed closely by Sweden at 24.2% and Iceland at 20.6%. These nations have demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering education and training opportunities for their ageing populations, setting a benchmark for other Member States to aspire to. Their achievements reflect a well-developed culture of inclusivity and lifelong learning that aligns with broader EU goals of social cohesion and innovation.

This gap in participation rates becomes even more concerning in the context of the ongoing demographic shift toward an ageing population. With the proportion of older adults in the EU expected to rise sharply in the coming years, this trend poses significant challenges for labor markets, healthcare systems, and social structures. Ensuring that older adults are engaged in education and training is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic necessity to harness the potential of this growing demographic group. By addressing this shortfall, Member States can promote active ageing, enhance social inclusion, and equip older adults with the skills needed to navigate an increasingly digitalized and interconnected world.

## Participation rate in education and training (last 12 months) by sex and age

Time frequency: Annual Age class: From 65 to 74 years Sex: Total Unit of measure: Percentage Time: 2022

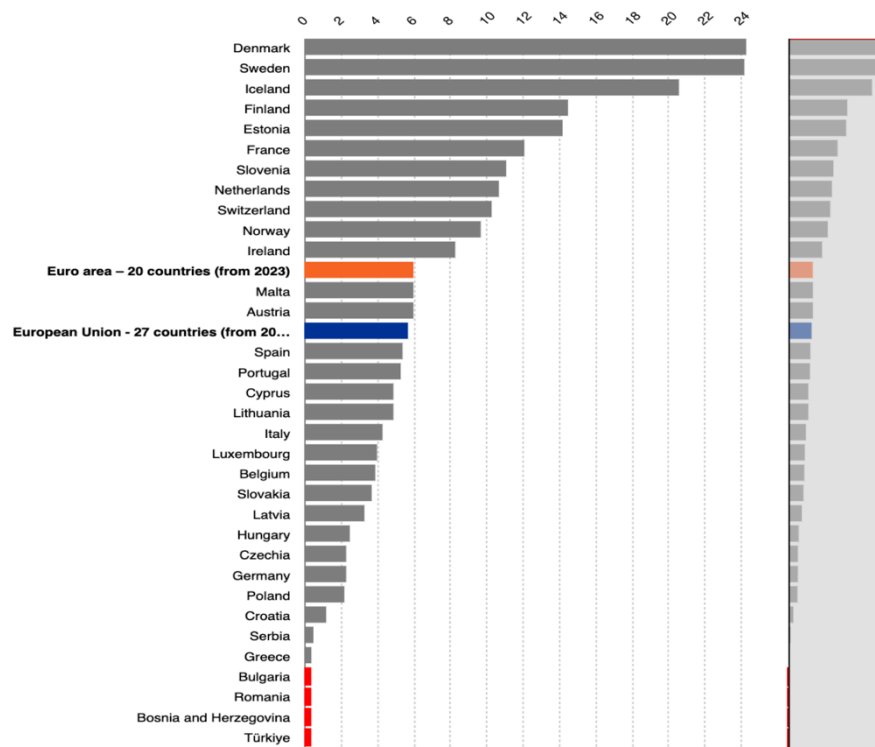


Figure 1: Source: EUROSTAT (Online data code: trng\_ifs\_17)

This trend is further supported by an analysis of data from [the Erasmus+ Projects Results Platform](#), focusing on projects funded under the Erasmus+ program. Specifically, data from 2021 to 2024, filtered to examine projects within the *KA2 Partnerships for Cooperation and Exchanges of Practices* (Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education and Small-Scale Partnerships in Adult Education), reveal striking results. Out of a total of 2,858 funded projects, only 262 projects (8%) addressed the topic of "active ageing." Within these 262 projects, a much smaller subset explicitly targeted older adults. Only 23 projects (1%) focused on participants aged 65 and over, 16 projects (1%) included participants aged 55 and over, and just 9 projects addressed the over-60 age group. It is worth noting that this analysis is based on the abstracts provided within the project descriptions, which explicitly mention the involvement of senior participants (over 55, over 60, and over 65).

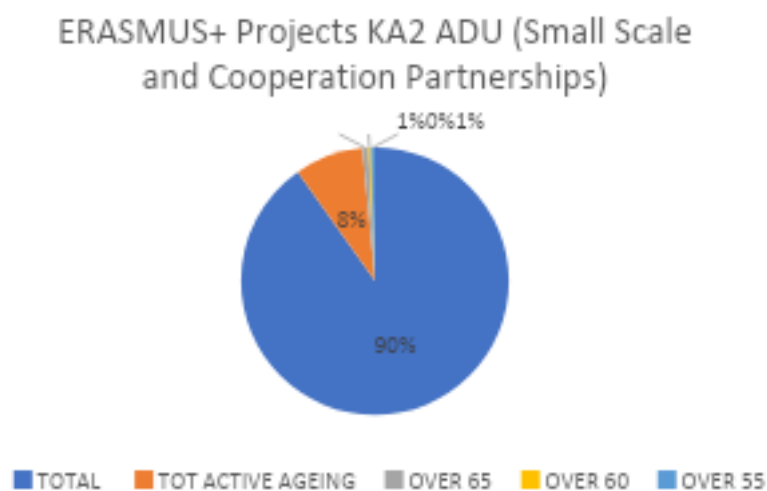


Figure 2: Own elaboration (2021-2024)

This data highlights a glaring underrepresentation of older adults in education and training initiatives within the *KA2 Partnerships for Cooperation and Exchanges of Practices*. Despite the increasing importance of lifelong learning in addressing the challenges posed by an ageing population, the participation of older adults remains marginal. This underrepresentation is particularly concerning given the ongoing demographic shift in Europe, where the proportion of older adults in the population is growing rapidly.

The limited focus on this demographic group within the Erasmus+ program suggests a missed opportunity to foster active ageing, enhance social inclusion, and equip older adults with the skills needed to adapt to societal and technological changes. Addressing this gap is crucial for ensuring that older adults are not left behind in the push for digital transformation, green transitions, and broader socio-economic inclusion. It also aligns with the EU's broader objectives of promoting lifelong learning, reducing social inequalities, and building a resilient and inclusive society.

Greater attention must be directed toward designing and funding projects that explicitly target older adults, particularly those aged 65 and above, to ensure their participation and contribution to society remain active and meaningful.

In today's complex digital and media environment, fostering resilience against disinformation is more important than ever. Media literacy plays a key role in this effort by improving critical thinking skills and equipping individuals with the ability to navigate online information effectively. It also empowers citizens to identify and counteract false or misleading content.<sup>5</sup> Fake news is described as "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and designed to mislead readers."<sup>6</sup> Disinformation, as outlined in UNESCO's handbook for journalism education and training authored by Ireton and Posetti, refers to deliberate attempts—often coordinated—to confuse or manipulate people using false information. In contrast, misinformation involves inaccurate or misleading content shared without any malicious intent.<sup>7</sup> The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) serves as a hub for collaboration among fact-checkers, academics, and other stakeholders. Supported by the European Commission, EDMO promotes the exchange of knowledge, identifies best practices in media literacy, and conducts awareness campaigns to combat the spread of disinformation. The spread of disinformation, misinformation, and foreign information manipulation represents a significant threat to democratic societies. An EU survey revealed that 86% of Europeans recognize the rapid spread of disinformation as a major concern for democracy. Building resilience against these threats by enhancing media literacy remains vital for empowering citizens of all ages to navigate today's media landscape and make informed decisions.<sup>8</sup>

A closer look at digital skills across the European Union highlights disparities based on age, gender, education level, and place of residence.

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[https://commission.europa.eu/news/true-or-false-how-defend-yourself-against-disinformation-2024-10-23\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news/true-or-false-how-defend-yourself-against-disinformation-2024-10-23_en)

<sup>6</sup> Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211–236. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>

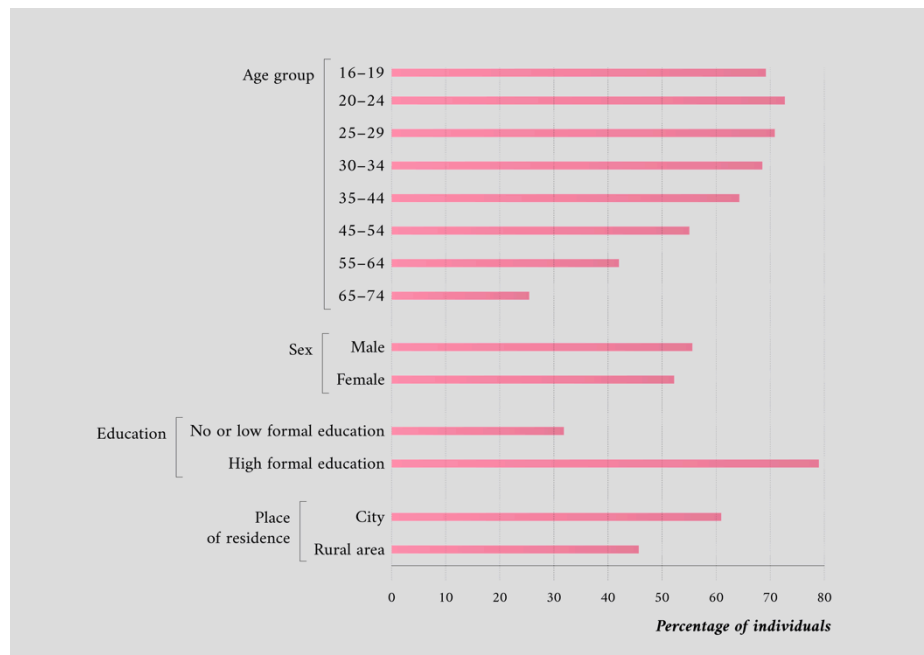
<sup>7</sup> Dame Adjin-Tettey, T. (2022). Combating fake news, disinformation, and misinformation: Experimental evidence for media literacy education. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 9(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2022.2037229>

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[https://commission.europa.eu/news/true-or-false-how-defend-yourself-against-disinformation-2024-10-23\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news/true-or-false-how-defend-yourself-against-disinformation-2024-10-23_en)

**Figure 3: Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills by socioeconomic status, 2021**



Source: Eurostat, 2021

Age emerges as a critical factor, with younger generations demonstrating significantly higher levels of digital competence compared to older groups. A slight gender gap exists, with men showing marginally better digital skills than women in the 16-74 age group. Education level strongly influences digital proficiency, as individuals with higher education are far more likely to possess basic or advanced digital skills compared to those with little or no formal education. Additionally, place of residence plays a role, with urban populations generally exhibiting stronger digital skills than their rural counterparts. This analysis underscores the need for targeted initiatives to address these disparities and ensure equitable access to digital education, which is essential for countering disinformation and fostering a more informed society.<sup>9</sup>

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

### POLICYMAKER

European Union policymakers play a vital role in bridging the digital divide and addressing the significant gap in digital and media literacy among older adults, particularly those aged 65 and over. The **DigitEld project** and subsequent interactions with this demographic have highlighted their limited technological skills, their reliance on traditional media formats, and their vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation. To foster their inclusion and empower them as informed European citizens, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Prioritize Funding for Over-65 Targeted Projects:** Allocate specific funding streams under Erasmus+, European Social Fund (ESF) and other EU programs to promote projects that directly target the over-65 population. This should include initiatives that foster their active

<sup>9</sup> <https://data.europa.eu/en/publications/datastories/digital-literacy-eu-overview>

participation in public decision-making processes and encourage their engagement as European citizens.

- 2. Strengthen Funding Mechanisms for Digital Literacy Initiatives:** Increase the allocation of targeted funding under Erasmus+ and the Digital Europe Programme to support projects specifically aimed at improving digital competencies among senior citizens. This funding should incentivize cross-border collaborations and innovative approaches tailored to older adults. Che facciano comprendere anche il tipo di giornalismo moderno
- 3. Promote Research and Data Collection on Older Adults' Digital Engagement:** Encourage the systematic collection of data on digital literacy levels among older age groups, particularly those over 74. This research should inform future policy development and identify the specific barriers faced by older adults in accessing and using digital technologies.

#### NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

National and regional authorities are tasked with implementing digital literacy programs that directly address local challenges. To ensure the inclusion of senior citizens, the following measures are proposed:

- 1. Facilitate Intergenerational Learning Programs:** Support the establishment of programs that pair younger volunteers with senior citizens for one-on-one digital training. This approach fosters community engagement while addressing the specific needs of older adults in a personalized manner.
- 2. Foster Local Networks for Senior Participation:** Facilitate partnerships between municipalities, community organizations, and older adult groups to co-create projects that address local needs. This approach ensures that older adults are not only beneficiaries but also active contributors to the design and execution of these initiatives
- 3. Encourage Localized Development of Technology Solutions:** Foster partnerships with technology providers to design localized and user-specific devices and applications that meet the needs of older adults. These solutions should include features like larger interfaces, simplified navigation, and built-in media literacy resources to help seniors become confident digital users.

#### VET ORGANIZATIONS

Vocational education and training (VET) providers play a crucial role in delivering hands-on training to senior citizens. To maximize their impact, the following strategies are recommended:

- 1. Design Tailored and Accessible Training Modules:** Develop training materials and programs that address the unique learning styles and needs of senior citizens, including simplified curricula and step-by-step guidance on digital tools.
- 2. Enhance Collaboration with Local Communities:** Partner with local organizations, such as senior clubs and cultural associations, to build trust and ensure broader participation in

digital literacy programs. These partnerships can also help identify and reach the most digitally excluded individuals.

3. **Promote Lifelong Learning through Micro-Credentials:** Implement micro-credential systems that recognize and validate the digital skills acquired by senior citizens. These credentials can encourage continued learning and provide tangible evidence of their competencies in the digital landscape.

## CONCLUSION

Older adults in the European Union, particularly those aged 65 and above, face significant barriers in accessing and effectively utilizing digital tools, especially when it comes to navigating the modern media landscape. Their reliance on traditional, paper-based media leaves them especially vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation, limiting their ability to participate fully as informed citizens. Feedback from the DigitEld project demonstrates a clear desire among this demographic to become more active in public decision-making and to embrace digital technologies for both personal and civic purposes.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to increase investment in projects aimed at enhancing digital and media literacy among senior citizens. These efforts should include developing user-friendly digital tools, creating comprehensive training programs, and fostering intergenerational learning. Moreover, national and regional governments must work closely with local organizations to ensure that older adults are empowered not only as users of technology but also as contributors to public discourse and community development.

By prioritizing these initiatives, the European Union can ensure that older adults are no longer left behind in the digital transformation, fostering a more inclusive and informed society that values the contributions of all its citizens. These efforts will also serve to strengthen social cohesion, promote active citizenship, and safeguard democratic values in the face of a rapidly evolving digital landscape.